Before, After and Between: Ordering Numbers to 20 in Year 1

Key points

- In Year 1, children learn to put numbers to 20 in order and say what comes immediately before, after or between two numbers.
- This skill is the foundation for later work with number lines, rounding and estimation—all key to maths success.
- Many children naturally count forwards to find the answer, but the goal is for them to instantly recognise neighbouring numbers.
- A visual number track (like a line marked 0–20) helps children see position on a line, not just say numbers in sequence.
- This works best when linked to real, familiar things around them: house numbers, pages in a book, marks on a ruler.
- It's playful and gradual—short, everyday moments are far more helpful than worksheets or drilling.

Things to try at home

- On a walk, hunt for number sequences: house numbers, bus numbers, page numbers. Point and ask 'What comes next?' or 'What's missing?'
- Make a simple number track on paper marked 0–20, point to a number and ask what's one before, one after, or in between.
- Use a ruler together: point to a number and ask 'What's just before this?' or 'What comes after?'
- Play board games that use a simple track—spotting the numbers as you move teaches position naturally.
- Look at a calendar or create a numbered washing line with pegs; move a peg and ask which numbers are beside it.

Find out more

- National Curriculum: maths at Key Stage 1 on gov.uk
- Ask your child's teacher about how they teach number ordering in your school.
- BBC Bitesize: Year 1 maths resources.